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DISARMAMENT PROJECTS AND AGREEMENTS  
(1899-1926)

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SUMMARY

The meeting of the Preparatory Commission called by the League of Nations to lay the ground-work for a general disarmament conference, including land, naval and air forces, gives new emphasis to a question of prime importance. For over twenty-five years competitive armaments have challenged the attention of the nations of the world. International conferences have labored with the problem. Plans have been drafted. Conventions have been signed; agreements concluded—with and without result. An accurate analysis of the situation today demands a precise knowledge of these previous efforts to control and limit military establishments.

What have been the concrete results of the past quarter century? The question was first seriously broached at the First Hague Conference in 1899. The Conference adjourned with an international tribunal—the Hague Court of Arbitration—and a number of conventions defining rules of warfare, to its credit. It adjourned without achieving any reduction in land or sea armaments. The Second Hague Conference met in 1907, established further rules of warfare, but no reduction of armaments. Proposals for a "naval holiday" came to naught in 1912, and the War intervened to prevent discussion for four years.

At Paris, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria were disarmed, and general reduction was contemplated in the Covenant of the newly created League of Nations. Plans were drafted at Geneva: the Esher Plan of 1921-22, the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, 1923, the Protocol of 1924. All failed to materialize, but they paved the way for the present discussions.

Meanwhile, at Washington, in 1921-22, the five leading naval powers concluded an agreement stopping further construction of capital ships, up to a certain point, and establishing a ratio not to be exceeded for a definite period of years.

Such is the record of the past twenty-five years. The failures and partial achievements of the past throw light on the problems to be faced by the Commission about to meet. This report presents the significant developments of recent years without comment or intentional bias.

#### THE HAGUE CONFERENCES, 1899 AND 1907

The first attempt to reduce the burdens of competitive armament was made in 1898, when Czar Nicholas of Russia issued an invitation to the Powers to meet at an international conference to examine "the question of ending the progressive development of existing armaments", in order to assure "to all nations the benefits of a real and lasting peace."

The First Hague Peace Conference of 1899, the result of the Czar's invitation, achieved certain specific, though limited, results:

First, the Convention for Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, concluded at the Conference, established the Permanent Court of Arbitration, with its seat at The Hague.

Second, a number of conventions and declarations, adopted at the Conference, established certain rules of warfare.

Toward actual reduction of land and sea armaments, and military budgets, the first item on the program, this Conference achieved nothing. A resolution expressing the desire that the governments should study the possibility of an agreement on this question and another resolution on the desirability of limiting the burdensome military charges, were without result.

The Second Hague Conference of 1907, called by the Czar and vigorously supported by President Roosevelt, resulted in conventions defining the rights of neutrals and establishing rules for conduct of both land

and naval warfare. Limitation of armaments was not included on the program, and discussion of this subject, insisted upon by the American delegation, merely led to adoption of a resolution reiterating the desire for study of the problem.

#### PROPOSED ANGLO-GERMAN NAVAL HOLIDAY, 1912

Meanwhile competition in armaments continued. In 1912 an unsuccessful attempt was made to check the naval rivalry between Great Britain and Germany. Lord Haldane, then British War Minister, went to Berlin in February, 1912 with a proposal for a "naval holiday". He returned with no prospect of an agreement. Two years later the World War broke out, and the question of disarmament receded into the background, only to be revived at the Paris Peace Conference.

#### PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE, 1919-1920

When the Peace Conference met, both the Allies and Germany had accepted President Wilson's Fourteen Points as the basis for negotiations. One of the Fourteen Points called for "adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety." The Treaty of Versailles dealt with the question of armaments in two ways:

First, provisions for general reduction and limitation of armaments were included in the Covenant of the League of Nations (Part I of the Treaty).

Second, provisions for the disarmament of Germany were included in Part V of the Treaty.

##### (1) Disarmament Provisions of the Covenant

The provisions for general reduction of armaments incorporated in the Covenant may be summarized as follows:

Article 8 of the Covenant provides: that the Council of the League shall formulate plans for the reduction of armaments "to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations;"

That when these plans have been adopted by the various governments, the limits thus fixed must not be exceeded without the Council's consent;

That the Council investigate the possibility of preventing the evil effects attendant upon private manufacture of arms;

That the members of the League interchange "full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to warlike purposes."

Article 23 of the Covenant provides:

That the League undertake "the general supervision of the trade in arms and ammunition with the countries in which the control of this traffic is necessary in the common interest."

(2) Disarmament of Germany under Versailles Treaty

The military, naval and air clauses (Part V) of the Treaty of Versailles contain the following provisions for the reduction and limitation of the armed forces of Germany:

After 1920, the German army must not exceed 100,000 men, including 4,000 officers.

Universal compulsory military service is abolished.

The German navy is restricted to six battleships, six light cruisers, twelve destroyers, twelve torpedo boats, and the personnel must not exceed 15,000 men, including 1,500 officers.

Submarines may not be constructed or acquired, even for commercial purposes.

The armed forces of Germany must not include any military or naval air forces.

The execution of the military, naval and air clauses was entrusted to Inter-Allied commissions. Moreover, Germany undertook to give every facility for any investigation which the League Council, acting if need be by a majority vote, might consider necessary.

That the military, naval and air clauses of the Treaty do not look to the unilateral disarmament of Germany as a permanent situation, but rather as a first step toward general disarmament, is indicated by the Preamble to Part V, as well as Article 8 of the Covenant. The Preamble reads as follows:

"In order to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations, Germany undertakes strictly to observe the military, naval and air clauses which follow."

(3) Treaties of Neuilly, St. Germain and Trianon

The other peace treaties concluded at the end of the war contained similar provisions for the disarmament of Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria.

The Treaty of Neuilly limits the military forces of Bulgaria to 20,000 men, the number of gendarmes, customs officials, police, etc. armed with rifles to 10,000, and the frontier guards to 3,000. Bulgaria is allowed to have 10 small boats for police and fishery duties.

The Treaty of St. Germain limits Austria's army to 30,000; 3 patrol boats may be kept on the Danube.

The Treaty of Trianon limits Hungary's army to 35,000, and permits Hungary to maintain 3 patrol boats on the Danube.

In each of these three countries universal compulsory military service is abolished, and air forces and submarines are forbidden.

#### THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE, 1921-1922

The Treaty of Versailles thus led to the disarmament of the Central Powers, but the problem of reducing and limiting the armaments of the victors and the neutrals remained. The League of Nations, although it has done much in the way of investigation and preparatory work, has not so far achieved any definite limitation or reduction of armaments. The first definite results were accomplished at the Conference for the Limitation of Armament, called by the American government, and held in Washington, November 12, 1921 to February 6, 1922. The Conference was limited to the powers with special interests in the Far East, as it dealt with Far Eastern problems as well as with disarmament.

As a result of the Conference, the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan and the United States signed a treaty for the limitation of naval armament, February 6, 1922. By this treaty the signatories agreed to stop the construction of capital ships, except for replacement of old ships, up to a certain specified limit. The signatories also agreed to scrap a number of capital ships specified in the treaty, and accepted the following ratio in regard to capital ships: United States, 5; British Empire, 5; Japan, 3; France, 1.75; Italy, 1.75.

The Washington Treaty did not prevent or limit competition in the building of submarines, auxiliary vessels, or aircraft. The same five powers did, however, sign another treaty relating to the use of submarines and noxious gases in warfare. By this treaty the signatories agreed not to use submarines as commerce destroyers, and declared that no submarine may sink a merchant vessel without complying with the rules for visit and search or without first placing the crew and passengers in safety. They also agreed not to use asphyxiating or poisonous gases in war. This Treaty has not come into effect, due to France's failure to ratify.

#### MOSCOW DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE, 1922

From its inception the Soviet government has professed a keen interest in disarmament. In the summer of 1922 Russia invited some of its neighbors, Finland, Latvia, Estonia and Poland, to a disarmament conference, which met in Moscow in December of that year. Rumania and Lithuania were invited later, but did not attend the Conference; Rumania declared that she could not accept the invitation unless Russia first recognized the new Rumanian frontier, including Bessarabia. The Conference failed because of the lack of mutual confidence. The Baltic states held out for a pact of non-aggression and arbitration as a necessary preliminary to reduction of armaments, whereas the Russian govern-

ment refused to sign such a treaty and insisted on immediate proportional reduction of armies as the only real test of peaceful intentions. So the Conference broke up without accomplishing anything.

### LEAGUE ACTION, 1920-1926

Since the meeting of the First Assembly, the League of Nations has recognized disarmament as one of its major problems. At the request of the Assembly the Temporary Mixed Commission for the Reduction of Armaments was appointed in 1921. This Commission proceeded to a thorough investigation of the problem.

#### (1) The Esher Plan, 1921-1922

The first definite scheme for the reduction of armaments was the one submitted in 1921-22 by Lord Esher. The scheme was similar to the Washington Naval Treaty in that it proposed to limit the military and air forces of various countries according to a fixed ratio. The scheme was rejected because it failed to reckon with the prevailing feeling of insecurity. The replies received from the various governments to questionnaires sent out by the Commission made it evident that a number of countries were unwilling to disarm unless given in return what they considered adequate guarantees of security. This fact was acknowledged by the Third Assembly in 1922, when it adopted a resolution, generally referred to as Resolution XIV, which definitely linked disarmament with security, and proposed a general treaty of mutual guarantee as the means of providing security.

#### (2) The Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, 1923

The Treaty of Mutual Assistance was drafted by the Temporary Mixed Commission during 1923, and was submitted to the Fourth Assembly, which referred it to the various governments for their consideration. This draft treaty combined the proposals of Viscount Cecil of Great Britain, and Colonel Requin of France. It provided a general guarantee by means of mutual assistance in case of aggression, combined in certain cases with special guarantees in the form of defensive alliances between a limited number of states. The guarantee would come into force only when the several states had undertaken to put into operation a plan of reduction of armaments, drawn up by the Council on the basis of estimates to be submitted by the governments.

Although 18 governments approved the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance in principle, so much opposition developed in regard to some of its features that it became apparent that it would fail of acceptance. A number of governments objected to the special defensive treaties as likely to restore the defensive alliances of pre-war times. Others objected that the provisions for disarmament were not specific enough, and still others, that a development of the principles of arbitration and international justice had not been provided for.

(3) The Geneva Protocol, 1924

On the basis of the above criticisms, and particularly in response to a growing movement in favor of arbitration, the Fifth Assembly drafted the Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes, commonly called the Geneva Protocol, which linked disarmament and security with arbitration. Like the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Geneva Protocol provided for sanctions in the form of military assistance to victims of aggression, but it went further by strengthening the procedure for the peaceful settlement of disputes, and by defining the aggressor as the state which refuses to comply with this procedure. The coming into effect of the guarantees was made conditional upon the acceptance of a plan for aramament reduction to be worked out at a disarmament conference to be held as soon as a specified number of states had ratified the Protocol.

The Protocol was promptly signed by 18 states, but its definite rejection in March, 1925, by the British government made it evident that at least for the present the Protocol would fail of general acceptance. It was not a complete failure, however; some of its principles, in a limited and modified form, were embodied in the agreements adopted at Locarno in October, 1925; and the "moral relaxation of the tension between nations" brought about by these agreements gave added impetus to the League's work for disarmament.

(4) The Preparatory Commission, 1926

In pursuance of a resolution adopted by the Sixth Assembly In September, 1925, the Council at its December session decided upon the composition and agenda of a Preparatory Commission, to meet February 15, 1926, to prepare for an international conference on the reduction and limitation of armaments. The following states were invited to be represented on the Commission: the ten states members of the Council, namely the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Sweden, Uruguay; six other members of the League of Nations, namely Bulgaria, Finland, the Netherlands, Poland, Rumania, the Serb-Croat-Slovene State; three non-members of the League, namely Germany, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, and the United States.

AGENDA OF THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION

The Council decided upon a list of seven questions to be submitted to the Preparatory Commission, which may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Definition of the expression "armaments", and of the military, economic, geographical and other factors which constitute the strength of a country in time of war and in time of peace.
- (2) Question whether disarmament measures should apply to the peace strength only, or to ultimate war strength as well.  
Definition of the term "reduction and limitation of arm-

aments"; discussion of the various forms of reduction and limitation in the case of land, sea and air forces.

- (3) Determination of standards by which to compare the armaments of the various countries, such as numbers, period of service, equipment, expenditures, etc.
- (4) Problem of distinguishing between "offensive" and "defensive" armaments.
- (5) Determination of principles on which to base a scale of armaments permissible to the various countries, taking into account their population, resources, geographical situation, land and sea communications, vulnerability of frontiers, time required to place armaments on war basis, security afforded by the Covenant or by separate treaties.  
Question whether reduction of armaments may be promoted by defining more closely the economic and military sanctions provided for in Article 16 of the League Covenant.
- (6) Problem of distinguishing between civil and military aircraft.  
Determination of the military value of civil aircraft and commercial fleets.
- (7) Possibility of regional disarmament in return for regional security. Relation of regional disarmament to general disarmament.

#### RELATED ACTION OF THE LEAGUE

So far, the achievements of the League in regard to reduction and limitation of armaments have been confined to clearing the ground and laying the foundation for a conference. But the League has also been active in related fields. It publishes an Armaments Year-Book containing statistical information in regard to the armaments, military expenditures, etc. of various countries. Preparatory work is under way for a conference on private manufacture of arms. In February, 1924, a preliminary conference was held at Rome under League auspices, for the purpose of extending the principles of the Washington Naval Treaty to states not signatories of that treaty; but this conference was without result. In May and June, 1925, an international conference on the control of the traffic in arms was held in Geneva; as a result of this conference, at which the United States and Germany were represented, an international convention for the supervision of the international trade in arms and ammunition and a protocol for the prohibition of the use of gases in warfare were signed on June 17.

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